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Paper 161

Fleeting graffiti:

Backjumps, mobilities and metro semiotics

by

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March 2016

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Abstract
This article discusses mobility as a semiotic device. Drawing mainly on examples from Stockholm, it analyses backjumps, a genre of train graffiti that inventively makes use of various forms of movement. The social, spatial existence of backjumps is underlined by mobility, from the moment they are created on temporary stationary trains until the point they are removed as part of regimented semiotic ordering of public space. As backjumps move through the metro system, their appearances and disappearances rework the visual composition of a number of interlinked spaces, briefly succeeding in transgressing the semiotic regimentation of public space. For properly grasping these semiotic transformations, mobility needs to be placed at the forefront of inquiry. Building on lines of thought from human geography and spatially interested sociolinguistics, the analysis demonstrates that a sensitization to the workings of mobility is apt for creating a more fine-grained understanding of the interplay between space and semiotic practice. In this vein, it seeks to introduce further nuance to a sociolinguistics that has focused extensively on the notion of landscape.

Introduction

This article attends to the relationship between mobility, graffiti writing and the semiotics of place, focusing on the Stockholm metro system. It further elaborates on the suggestion to make mobility a central concern in spatially interested sociolinguistics (see Stroud and Mpendukana 2009; Sebba 2010; Blommaert 2013, 8; Jaworski 2014; Moriarty 2014). There are good reasons to pursue this line of inquiry. To be sure, graffiti is proverbially mobile. Not only has it diffused at a global scale (e.g. Pennycook 2007; Alim et al. 2009; Kimvall 2014, 37–40), but it also encompasses a significant amount of mobility at a level of practice. Arguably, the latter forms of mobility become more pronounced in train graffiti (Castleman 1982; Austin 2001; Fraser and Spalding 2012). Moving trains can insert a single instance of graffiti in a sequence of interconnected spaces, transforming them visually for a short period of time. As trains painted with graffiti move along their predestined paths, the writing that they mobilize is brought to different audiences, moving in and out of constantly shifting gazes. Semiosis, in such cases, is inseparable from mobility.

Probing this mobility, I will attend to the production and circulation of *backjumps*, an eminently mobile genre of graffiti writing. Among graffiti writers, the term *backjump* refers to a quickly completed piece executed on a train *en route* during a prolonged stop, such as at a terminal station (Kimvall 2014, 194). A backjump creates a simultaneous spatialization of semiosis and semiotization of space. Grappling with these processes, it seems well motivated to eschew "a point of view that takes certain kinds of fixity and boundedness for granted and instead *start* with the fact of mobility" (Cresswell 2011, 551). Boundedness and fixity, here, would include untested assumptions about the emplaced and permanent nature of signs, ostensibly confirmed through a snapshot gaze (see Massey 2005, 36–42; Blommaert 2013, 51; Moriarty 2014, 458). From this standpoint, the article not only contributes to sociolinguistic research on graffiti (see Scollon and Scollon 2003, passim; Pennycook 2009, 2010; Blommaert 2016), but also to the study of the semiotics of place (see Shohamy and Gorter 2009; Ben-Rafael et al. 2010; Jaworski and Thurlow 2010b; Johnstone 2010; Blommaert 2013; Stroud forth.). In dialogue with this body of scholarship, I will elucidate how and why an engagement with semiotic mobility affords insights into the relationship between space and semiosis, thus stressing the broader conceptual relevance of mobility in a spatially interested sociolinguistics (cf. Stroud and Mpendukana 2009; Sebba 2010; Moriarty 2014).

Whereas the manifold interfaces of semiotic practice, space and materiality often appear to be inseparable from various forms of movement, mobility has not been exhaustively explored as a constituting factor in the semiotics of place. Despite the fact that contemporary sociolinguistics is firmly interested in mobility (see Blommaert et al. 2005; Heller 2007; McIlvenny et al. 2009; Blommaert 2010; Blommaert and Rampton 2011; Pennycook 2012; Pennycook and Otsuji 2015; Stroud 2015), and that this interest certainly reverberates through its spatially interested strands (see Shohamy and Gorter 2009; Shohamy et al. 2010; Jaworski and Thurlow 2010b; Rubdy and Ben Said 2015), detailed analyses of the semiotic workings of mobility are rare in the sociolinguistic studies of place. To the extent mobility is discussed in relation to spatial aggregates of linguistic and non-linguistic semiotics, it is readily treated as an inherent potential or as a temporary state of given semiotic artefacts (see Moriarty 2014; Zabrodskaja and Milani 2014, 2). While this conceptualization certainly tells us something about the ways in which mobility comes into play in semiosis, there is undoubtedly more to be said (see Cresswell 2006; Urry 2007; Adey 2010). In sociolinguistics and beyond, mobility has rarely been approached as a semiotic expedient in its own right (but see Milani 2014; Moriarty 2014; Stroud and Jegels 2014). Much of its capacity to create and convey meaning is yet to be investigated.

In this spirit, the epistemological outlook of the article furthers recent qualitative sociolinguistic efforts to arrive at a more nuanced comprehension of semiosis as a mobile spatial

phenomenon (e.g. Thurlow and Jaworski 2014; Jaworski 2015; Stroud and Peck 2015). Elaborating on Milani's (2014, 204) proposal to use selectively crafted assemblages of fleeting events as vehicles for grasping less stable forms of semiosis, the analysis brings together a number of elements relating to the volatile existence of backjumps in the Stockholm metro system. In line with these intentions, this mobile method of sorts (see Büscher and Urry 2009; D'Andrea et al. 2011; Büscher et al. 2011; Merriman 2014) aims to capture the manifold forms of mobility that come together in a mobile instance of graffiti. Thus, following upon the next section's illustrations of the regimentation of graffiti upheld in the Stockholm metro, a selection of empirical materials and a subsequent discussion seek to unpack and contextualize the semiotic principles and tensions that coalesce in mobility. Ultimately, this vantage point highlights the pertinence of grasping the ways in which mobility functions as a semiotic device.

Looking for absences: Graffiti in the Stockholm Metro
Thinking about signs as mobile phenomena calls for a sensitization to the continuities and discontinuities that are patterned in any form of mobility (Jaworski 2014, 524; cf. Cresswell and Martin 2012). In Stockholm, just as in many other cities (e.g. Castleman 2004; Young 2010; Ehrenfeucht 2014), graffiti is subjected to a sophisticated regime of erasure and illegitimisation (Kimvall 2013a, 2014: 105–149). Accounting for graffiti in the Stockholm metro, hence, means accounting for the sometimes "surprising combinations of presences and absences" (Sheller and Urry 2006, 222) that constitute its mobile social life, as well as for the ways in which graffiti appears and disappears. Indeed, the evanescence of backjumps calls for a consideration of the ways in which mobility persists in and in relation to this category of semiosis.

Just as a city "breathes and exhales" semiotic resources (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015, 56), it sometimes makes them evaporate. At least, this seems to hold true for graffiti writing. As Jørgensen (2008, 237) notes, graffiti "is produced under constantly changing circumstances and with relatively little chance of lasting for very long." Paint might fade and wither away. Other writers might add layers of form and colour onto a surface already covered with graffiti. Workers might be summoned to paint over or remove graffiti as a part of the overall upkeep and maintenance of the city.

The last-mentioned form of erasure occupies a special place in the semiotic ordering of public spaces. It is part and parcel of the semiotic labour through which graffiti is enregistered as intrusive and disruptive. Contingently, acts of erasure are not only acts of visual reversion. More accurately, they are co-productive of the semiotic order that graffiti writing is held to transgress. As such, they indexically invoke a polar opposition between appropriate and inappropriate forms of semiosis, as their procedures of recreating a semiotic order "simultaneously manifest their inversion" (Kulick 2005, 622) in their performative positioning of graffiti as out-of-place. A situated act of erasing graffiti not only reworks a place semiotically, but at the same time asks, unvexedly: "if this graffiti *was supposed* to be here, why would it *have to* be removed?" In this vein, the institutionally sanctioned evaporation of graffiti both materially reiterates and symbolically points to authorized systems of ideas about the acceptable visual composition of places, as well as to beliefs about what constitutes a legitimate process for altering this composition (cf. Cresswell 1996, 57–59; Pennycook 2010, 138–143). Moreover, such discourses render the symbolic dimensions of erasure more transparent (see Silverstein 2003, 196), thereby unveiling the logic that strives regiment places semiotically.

Returning to our case, such metadiscursive presuppositions are explicitly articulated in Stockholm's policy statements on, as the principal document puts it, "graffiti and similar forms of vandalism," and the ways these forms of semiosis are to be managed[1] (see also Kimvall 2013a, 2014, 105–149). Important for an analysis of backjumps in the Stockholm metro, the policy text accomplishes two things. First, it presents graffiti writing as an illegitimate, unaesthetical and vile

incursion into neat and orderly urban spaces, as well as a threat to a harmonious society more widely. Second, it suggests several strategies for defusing this threat, contrastively invoking the desirability of a semiotically well-kept urban space. As argued below, the policy text is essentially concerned with issues pertaining to digression and ordinariness. Through polar images of cleanliness and defilement, it defines semiotic normality as an absence, that is to say, as a negation of the presence of graffiti.

Tellingly, the eight-point document construes the inappropriateness of graffiti with discursive imageries of the purported safety, cleanliness and beauty of the graffiti-free city. Stating that "Stockholm shall be secure, safe, clean and beautiful," it makes clear that "graffiti and similar forms of vandalism shall not be accepted." Not under any conditions, it seems to suggest. The text categorizes graffiti as a breach in the non-threatening and immaculate urban space if it appears anywhere, that is, "on any building, on the ground, on any facility or vehicle." This censoring is reinforced through an assertion that a rapid response to "suspected graffiti writing among youths" will "prevent truancy, substance abuse and criminality" in this particular group. These denunciations of graffiti as an undesired and antisocial subcultural practice are paired with a categorical dictate of erasure. The text demands that graffiti "shall be sanitized – i.e. removed – within 24 hours after it has been discovered, documented and reported." In this vein, it also requires that all vehicles, machinery and equipment used by the city or by its subcontractors shall be "sanitized" from any graffiti before such objects can deployed in a public space. These immediate forms of semiotic control blend with more perennial strategies, as the policy document clarifies that "any construction or reconstruction project, or a similar type of change in the urban milieu should opt for designs that prevent and obstruct graffiti and similar types of vandalism, whenever this is possible."

Significantly, although unsanctioned writing is thoroughly criminalized in the Stockholm metro, its illegitimacy cannot be reduced to its judicial status (cf. Cresswell 1996, 37–46; Pennycook 2010, 140; Dickinson 2008; Kimvall 2014, 46ff.). In Stockholm's anti-graffiti policy, graffiti is not bespoken as property crime, but is enregistered as inherently out of place, and is accordingly treated as a threat to perceived or desired forms of order (cf. Cresswell 1996, 37). Illegal occurrences of graffiti, in this view, are seldom regarded as mere breaches of law, but are concomitantly regarded as breaches of taste, of dominating beliefs about the appropriate placement and qualities of semiosis, and of similar symbolic manifestations of social order (Cresswell 1996, 37–60; cf. Dickinson 2008; Pennycook 2010). Now, policy guidelines do not necessarily entail efficient policing. In the Stockholm metro system, however, the institutional goal of swift graffiti removal is more or less fulfilled. Whereas graffiti might exist for some time in spaces-in-between (see Dickens 2008; cf. Augé 1995), such as along tracks above ground in the peripheries of the system, or in the unlit tunnels between the underground stations in its central sections, it is quickly erased in the metro spaces that are open to travellers (Kimvall 2013a, 2014). For the most part, graffiti exists somewhere other than in metro stations and on the rolling stock. In 2013, to take one example, there were 16,469 reports of illegal graffiti in the Stockholm County public transportation system.[2] To someone travelling in the Stockholm metro during that year, or later for that matter, an overwhelming majority of these inscriptions would have remained invisible. This invisibility was not only caused by the practical difficulties for a single person to attain a panoptic view on tracks, walls and trains. Rather, the relative obscurity of graffiti is contingent on the city's pervasive efforts to purge graffiti from public space in general, and from the metro system in particular. Not only is the temporal and spatial existence of graffiti disjoined from the patterned movement of the traveller, but the systematic erasure causes it to be an ever-present absence, which sometimes transforms into a fleeting semiotic fact. If this retrospective scope is limited to graffiti written on metro trains, tremendously few, if any, of the 16,469 instance of illegal graffiti that were reported in 2013 remain as of today.

Absences, as Edensor (2013, 450) observes, can loom "for long periods in some places, generating and sustaining imaginaries." While this is an apt description of the nonexistence of train

graffiti in the Stockholm metro, this invisibility is nevertheless occasionally transformed by the sudden presence of graffiti writing. By seeking out these moments of semiotic transformation the following analyses engages with this persistent absence, thus examining these forms of mobility, and the visual effects they instigate. More precisely, it focuses on the forms of mobility that produce and concatenate these appearances and nonappearances of graffiti. Drawing on several resources, such as photographic, discursive and filmic accounts of train graffiti, the empirical montage serves to discuss the forms of semiosis – the interlinked absences and presences – that mobility engenders.

Watching, writing, erasing graffiti
Mobile metro markings
Waiting for the train in the Fridhemsplan metro station in central Stockholm late afternoon in March 2014, I suddenly found myself looking at two graffiti pieces. A metro train had just pulled into the platform. The pieces had stopped right in front of me. Both read BST.

The pieces were backjumps, executed on a train in traffic, and were now circulating in the metro system for a limited period of time. One piece (figure 1) consisted of slightly tilted, dynamically executed letters stretching from the very front of the train to the first set of doors. The text was painted in metallic chrome colour. The letters had thick black contours and three dimensional effects painted on the left sides of the letters' vertical parts. Although the piece was more or less finished, it gave the impression of having been painted quickly. There was no background, no extra lines, and not more than two colours. There were no tags or additional messages added to the piece. Some chrome paint had ended up outside the black lines, forming a grey veil above the S. The T had been left slightly transparent. Perhaps the writers ran out of paint, or for that matter, did not have enough time to finish the letter properly. Moreover, the piece was flanked by another set of orange and black letters, which likewise read BST (not pictured). It looked as if it had been finished even more hastily. The train's original colours were visible through the orange spray paint. There were no three-dimensional elements, and some of the lines were left uncompleted. The moment of observation was defined and framed by the mobility of the train.

Figure 1. BST backjump (in motion). Fridhemsplan metro station, 19 March 2014.

As quickly as the pieces had shown up, they moved on, out of sight. In total, they were present in the station for no longer than one minute, counting from the moment the painted section of the first train car entered the station from the tunnel until it disappeared again as the train moved on. The train's stop lasted approximately as much of this short period time as did its movement. There was

little time for any deeper *in situ* analysis of any of the pieces. As the driver closed the doors of the train, I took a couple of pictures with the camera on my phone. As seen in figure 1, they turned out to be somewhat blurred. The train was already moving into the tunnel, out of the fluorescent lights in the station. Moreover, travellers on their way to the escalators passed the pieces, occasionally obstructing my view of them. Some threw a glance at the letters. Some stopped and looked, interestedly, surprised or irritated. Others did not seem to take much notice of the letters on the side of the metro train, nor of my attempts to take photos of the pieces. Yet, the backjumps had achieved something. If only in passing, their unforeseen entry had altered the visual composition of the station (figure 2).
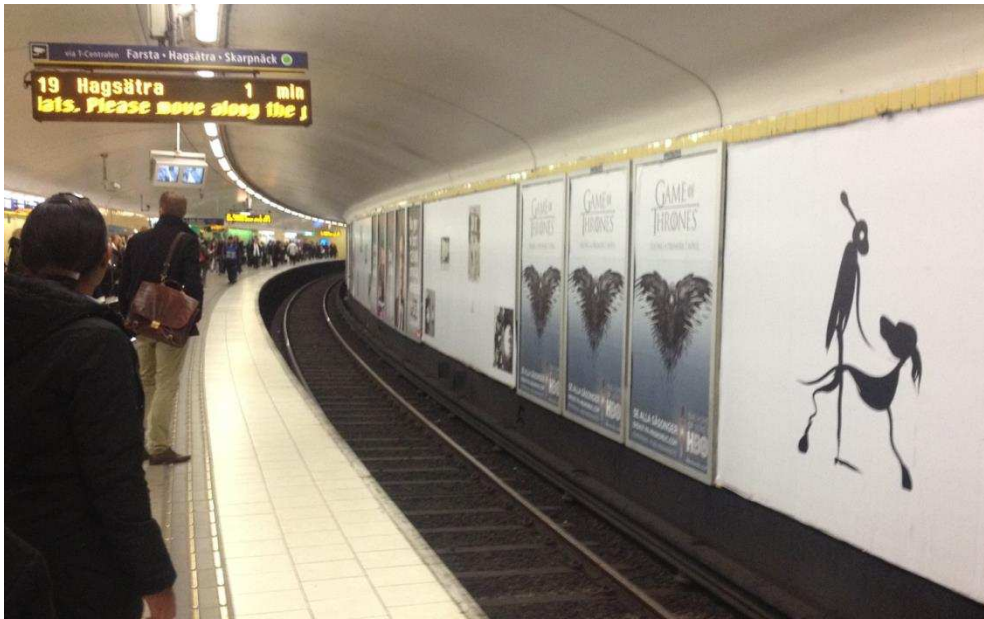

Figure 2. Order restored. Fridhemsplan metro station, 19 March 2014.

Needless to say, as illustrated by figure 2, the backjumps left the fixed imageries of the place untouched, reset as they moved on. Across the tracks, big commercial posters shared the wall with commissioned artwork that depicted, among other things, an anthropomorphic cricket petting a thin dog. There was some printed information about the metro system posted on message boards on the walls of the platform (not pictured). Electronic signs suspended from the ceiling transmitted traffic information, for the moment urging people to move towards the centre of the platform, interchangeably in Swedish and English. Everything was as it always seems to be.

As maintained by Stroud (2014, 214), mobile words are made to move through "discordant and competing processes." An instance of writing, in this view, precipitates in a place as a temporary outcome of the interplay of opposing forces. Contingently, both a written word and the place where it appears can be expected to change. The writing might be remodelled, replaced or removed, which will alter the place semiotically. The place, for that matter, might change in some other way, possibly recontextualizing the provisionally emplaced word. In this regard, a place encompasses both coherence and dispersion, in the sense that its "elements are drawn together at a particular conjuncture only to disperse or realign" (Anderson and McFarlane 2011, 125). A semiotic assemblage can always be rejigged. Or, as Cresswell and Martin (2012, 517) put it, the "forms of temporary stability" that persist in a particular place are "coextensive with their potential collapse."

This way of thinking entails a shift in gaze and engagement. If semiosis is approached through the nested processual forces by which it is assembled and dissembled, it will be difficult to reduce space to merely a physical *context* for signs, writing and other modes of signification. Pushing this metalinguistic trope further, it is clear that the relationship between space and semiosis is akin to

the linguistic anthropological concept of contextualization (e.g. Bauman and Briggs 1990; Silverstein 1992), that is, to the idea that communicative activities do not simply go on *somewhere*, but that they continuously define their own spatial and temporal frames. By rethinking meaning in terms of processes and relations, the *somewhere* is conceptualized as an emergent reality, continuously shaped in the interactions between manifold agents, actions, and processes, none of which can exert complete control over the development of the communicative assemblage (cf. Bauman and Briggs 1990, 69). In the same vein, the totality of semiotic process cannot be reduced to any of its parts (see DeLanda 2006; Harman 2008). This outlook, hence, emphasizes places as "ever-shifting constellations of trajectories" (Massey 2005, 151). It consequently compels us to engage with the nested semiotization of space and the spatialization of semiosis, that is, with the myriad intersecting processes that jointly shape signs and space. Not least, it provides a suitable analytical texture for grasping "fleeting encounters" (Jaworski and Thurlow 2010c), such as those unfolding around a backjump.

Returning to the BST backjumps in the Fridhemsplan metro station, it is clear that the joint mobility of the graffiti and the train partook in a reconfiguration of the place in question. The patterned movement of the train added a new semiotic element to the assemblage of the station, thereby shattering the durable visual composition of the place. In accomplishing this transformation, the backjumps likewise created a breach in the semiotic regimentation of the metro system. They succeeded in transgressing semiotic and discursive control exercised vis-à-vis graffiti in the Stockholm metro system, infiltrating both a mobile object (i.e. the train) and sections of the infrastructure of mobility in which this object circulated (i.e. the metro system). By merging graffiti writing with the ordinary and highly ordered patterns and flows of a metro train, the writers who produced the BST backjumps did not simply alter a surface, but effectively transformed the array of spaces through which the surface ultimately moved. Although their writing certainly managed to surpass the anti-graffiti regime upheld in the Stockholm metro, this transgression was nonetheless momentary. It was coeval with the backjumps' movement through the metro, and was repeatedly accentuated at the train's short stops at stations.

As this example demonstrates, mobility heightens the temporal dimension embedded in any spatially existing semiosis. While the mobility of the BST backjump thus added specific semiotic traits to several places, the effects of this semiotic process were changeable, impermanent and eventually interrupted (see Anderson and MacFarlane 2010, 126). Indeed, the BST backjumps could not be observed at a later stage, and nothing in the station space would bear visible witness to their earlier appearance. If train graffiti were a habitually occurring semiotic feature among the Stockholm metro's imageries, a backjump would be but a visual routine. The BST backjumps, however, never attained a degree of relative durability in the metro system, but were demoted to invisibility. As a matter of fact, they have ceased to exist. The joint mobility of the train and the graffiti was embedded in a movement towards erasure, which eventually precipitated in the removal of the backjumps. Within a few hours after they had appeared in the Fridhemsplan metro station, the BST backjumps had been cleaned off the train. In the trajectory spanning from acts of writing to acts of erasure, mobility was entangled in the production of semiosis, as well as in the process of making it disappear. Mobility engendered semiosis, but likewise defined the temporal limitations for its spatial existence.

Resourceful mobilities
"Limitations are what make graff," Swedish graffiti writer Leon argues, reflecting on the conditions of the production of train graffiti.[3] In the Stockholm metro system, physical and semiotic limitations to graffiti writing abound. Such restrictions are designed to keep people in certain places, and to keep them out of others. Some spaces are locked; others are equipped with barbed wire, with motion detectors, or with alarms. Other spaces might contain surveillance equipment intended to police or deter undesired ways of being and behaving. As metro travellers, people are not supposed to engage in

begging or unauthorized busking, and are expected not to infringe on their co-travellers with excessive talk, or sounds, or smells, or proximity (cf. Urry 2007, 104–109; Symes 2013). Most definitely, they are not supposed to write graffiti on any surface of the infrastructure.

As stressed by backjumps, these physical and semiotic limitations that are imposed in metro spaces can, nevertheless, be subverted. The semiotic control of the metro spaces is not total in nature. Just as with any assemblages of signs (cf. DeLanda 2006, Ch.2), the semiotics of the metro can change at certain temporal conjunctures. As the BST backjumps illustrate, mobility can be drawn upon in this process. Such resourceful uses of mobility are, however, subjected to a number of constraints. Whereas a moving backjump can transgress the semiotic order of a metro station through inventive use of mobility, the process of accessing and producing this mobility is not without its inherent limitations. It necessarily relies on graffiti writers' proficiency in transgressing several other spatial and temporal limitations that have come to be imposed on the genre of writing that they practice. A backjump is essentially a mobilization of the embodied capacity to complete a graffiti piece, preferably without being observed, interrupted or apprehended, in the few minutes when a train remains static, As such, it calls for a practical mastery of several co-present forms of mobility: of the train, of the metro system, of the body. In short, if a backjump shall transgress the semiotic regimentation of a place, other constraints placed on semiotic production need to be overcome as well. This is illustrated in figure 3 below, which shows a sequence of stills from a video clip posted on YouTube. Here, two writers are busy painting graffiti on a metro train at a Stockholm metro station, completing a black and chrome backjump that reads WUFC. The stills typify one action schema of backjump production: a modus operandi created at the intersection of the movement and stasis of the trains in this mass-transit system.

Figure 3. Graffiti writers painting a backjump.

In figure 3, two writers have jumped the fence at the Fruängen terminal station in southern Stockholm. The train stands still for approximately ten minutes. Consequently, effectiveness and cooperation are essential for achieving the planned result: a train piece finished in the available timespan.

As the figure highlights, there is a great deal of coordination between the actions of the two writers, who move swiftly and methodically as they go to work. Each of them takes care of different sets of tasks, speeding up the completion of the piece through coordinated movement. One

writer sketches the letter combination WUFC in chrome paint (pictures 1 to 3). As he moves along the metro car, the other writer follows him, filling in the letters with the same chrome colour, using two spray cans for increased speed and efficiency (3). Having finished the C (3), and thus having completed drawing the letters, the first writer moves back, and starts to add black contours and three-dimensional effects to the filled-in letters (4). As he allows the letters to emerge from the recently added mass of chrome, his partner completes the fill-in on the last letters (4 and 5). Having finished this task, the second writer proceeds to paint the background, which consists of two fields of deep red on either side of the WUFC lettering (5 and 6). The first writer, who has now finished the letters' black contours (6), proceeds to write tags (Que, Rilo) on the W and crew names (WUFC, SDK) on the C. He also writes the year (2001) to the left of the C (6 and 7). Meanwhile, the second writer has finished the red background. Moving back towards the W, he adds a white second contour (7) to frame the letters, separating them from the background. After completing some details on the letters by adding a few white lines on the chrome paint (8), the writers climb onto the train. The train pulls out of the platform and continues its journey along the metro line (9).

The production of the backjump stresses the necessity of including stillness and immobility in a broader understanding of mobility (Cresswell 2012, 645). During the few minutes that the stop lasts, the writers efficiently take advantage of the train's temporary stillness and ensuing movement in order to achieve several ends. Their backjump emerges from an inventive appropriation of the patterned, predictable mobility of the metro train. This form of semiotic intervention creates a new form of semiotic mobility, which not only is turned into a means of exposing and circulating graffiti, but which also introduces a series of contingent transgressions of the metro system's semiotic order. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that although this semiotic event both makes use of and produces mobility, the making of the backjumps relies extensively on a relative degree of immobility.

Revealingly, the immobility of the metro train "is thoroughly incorporated in practices of moving" (Cresswell 2012, 648; cf. Hannam et al. 2006, 3; Cresswell 2010), that is, of moving a constellation of written names through certain parts of the metro system. The train moves and stops. The writers' tensed moments of waiting and observing the perimeter are transformed into rapid action. They move out and start to paint. Their joint corporeal movements unfold during an ensuing phase of relative immobility: the train stands still while they move vividly. As their semiotically productive cooperation culminates in the completion of the backjump, the train becomes mobile again. In the example at hand, the moving train serves as a stealthy getaway; that is, as a path for the writers to move away from the site of creation without being caught. From this moment on, the backjump becomes synchronized with the timetabled mobility of the train. The rhythm of stops and travels are reiterated until the train is eventually taken out of service. Until that time, when the backjumps eventually will be removed, however, the patterned mobility of the semiotically transformed train is brought into dialogue with other forms of mobility, with other trajectories that cross through the places that the train passes. Moving with the train, the backjumps animate an array of spaces with new and temporary images. Throughout this trajectory, following Lefebvre (2004, 46), the initial moment of transgression will persist in an array of places, resonating as unexpected moments of semiotic transgression.

Although the Stockholm metro system, like any infrastructure of mass mobility (Urry 2007, 90–111; Löfgren 2008; Edensor 2011), regulates flows of people, time and matter, the regimentations it produces are neither ubiquitous nor permanent. As argued above, in relation to figures 1 and 2, transgressions occur whenever a backjump semiotically upsets the assemblage of a metro station. As the example of the WUFC backjumps stresses, transgressions also occur whenever a backjump is painted. In some respects, the constraints that writers manage to transgress by painting backjumps are different than those in place in the *loci classici* of train graffiti writing, that is, in train yards and depots (see Castleman 1982, 2004; Austin 2001; Dickinson 2008). By way of comparison, it

should be stressed that a terminal station in the Stockholm metro lacks many security measures that are typically found in the system's train yards and depots. In contrast to such sealed-off spaces, stations belong to the most accessible parts of any mass-transit system. This accessibility does not only apply to passengers, but also to writers bent on painting backjumps. At an outdoor station in the Stockholm metro, the fencing is usually lower, equipped with less aggressive barbed wire, and typically lacks alarms. There are no motion detectors or floodlights. With the exception of rush hours, terminal stations are rather empty, and there are relatively few metro workers around.

Relatively speaking, a place like a terminal station invites graffiti writing on trains. A piece that is completed here, as a backjump, will not be subject to the graffiti removal regime that is brought to bear on trains in yards. While trains that are painted in train yards will be meticulously cleaned of graffiti before they are permitted to enter into traffic, backjumps can move through the metro system for some time before they are taken out of service so that the graffiti can be removed. Nevertheless, there exist tangible constraints on backjump production. When painting backjumps, writers operate illicitly in a hazardous space, under the pressure of time. Yet, their semiotic intervention in the mobility of the metro system reworks these limitations. Recalling Leon's point of view, they create a potential for their own momentary toppling. The writers' capitalization on a moment of relative immobility becomes a means for overcoming and reconfiguring a semiotic order. Accordingly, the patterned mobility of metro system partakes in the subversion of its own poised imageries.

The example developed in relation to figure 3, thus, illustrates how several interspersed forms of mobility participate in the production and circulation of semiosis in the metro. Since the figure consists of material flowing through YouTube, a well-developed "online infrastructure of graffiti" (Blommaert 2016; cf. Light et al. 2012), it likewise points to arenas of semiotic dissemination that exist beyond the limited sections of the metro in which the WUFC backjump in figure 3 actually appeared. This course of things is yet another semiotically relevant form of mobility. While a backjump in the Stockholm metro eventually will succumb to erasure, it can be documented and remobilized through digital media (cf. Kimvall 2013b, 81). However, while it can be recast online, the extensions and reorganization of its initial mobility are nevertheless on par with the backjump's movement away from the space in which it originated.

Time and transgression
The discursive image of the abrupt appearance of trains adorned with graffiti is by no means new. In a 1973 interview, pop-artist Claes Oldenburg uttered a much-quoted statement about the fairly novel, at the time, imageries of graffiti. Recalling a moment akin the examples developed in relation to figures 1 and 2, he dwelled on the astonishment he experienced when witnessing a semiotically transformed subway train, the well-known space changing around him. Thus Oldenburg reflected[5]:

> *"[Y]ou are in a grey and sad subway station when all the sudden a graffiti train breaks, bringing with it the light of a bunch of tropical flowers. You think: it's anarchy, and you ask yourself if trains will keep working. But then you get used to it."*

To Oldenburg, the passing of the graffiti train was an overpowering experience. The train's capacity to change public space for a few seconds left him awed. Much like some of Oldenburg's own commissioned sculptures – notably over-dimensioned everyday objects installed in public spaces – the mobile graffiti called expectations into question, rejigging the spaces in which it appeared. However, if we take it from Oldenburg, the graffiti train did not just topple a semiotic order. It was, in his view, truly subversive, even anarchistic. Sending shockwaves beyond the semiotic realm, it seemed to challenge public order at heart, reordering the city's "neutralised, homogenized space" (Baudrillard 1993[1976]: 76). Through these licentious acts of writing "the very form of the media themselves, that is, their mode of production and distribution, was attacked for the first time" (Baudrillard 1993[1976],

80), as graffiti writers commandeered structures built for transporting faceless masses of nameless people, for spreading their names across the metropolis.

Following this interpretation, painted trains can be read as speaking against the semiotics of urban order (Baudrillard [1976] 1993). Be that as it may, it should be noted that this reading encompasses a degree of indeterminacy. A single instance of graffiti reveals little about the rationale embodied in the acts of writing through which it was produced, and even less about the practical logic of the writing game (see Stewart 1987; Cresswell 1996, 21–23; Pennycook 2010). What the social life of a single instance of graffiti *can* point to, nonetheless, are contingent conditions of production and circulation. While these conditions are dynamic and diverse, the physical presence and temporal permanence of graffiti can, as we have seen, be restricted in several ways.

Worth noting is that these interwoven patterns of appearances and disappearances symbolically unite the example from the Stockholm metro with Oldenburg's narrative. In both cases, the public transportation systems' mirage of order and stability briefly disintegrate as rolling pieces briefly disrupt the visual order of the stations (cf. Graham and Thrift 2007, 10). The reasons for these disruptions, however, are different. In Oldenburg's view, the shock effect of train graffiti would sooner or later be lost. The moment of surprise would wear off and travellers would "get used to" the shifts in the visual makeup of the public transportation system. The graffiti trains would become a routine of the public transport experience, eventually blending with other everyday urban semiotics. Nonetheless, his prediction was incorrect. In fact, *every* graffiti piece that Oldenburg *ever* saw on a New York subway train has been erased since that moment of encounter. The mobility of semiosis was funnelled into an offward trajectory, through which graffiti was removed from the places where it first circulated. Hence, while mobile semiosis has a capacity to defy, surpass and visually transform places, its resultant semiotic transformations are not necessarily permanent.

As opposed to the "insurrections of signs" (Baudrillard [1976] 1993) that unravelled for years the rapid transit systems of bygone days, the BST backjumps did not last long. Whereas Oldenburg and Baudrillard witnessed the emergence of a new sly semiotic practice, which definitely transgressed their previous aesthetic experience, the arrival of the BST backjumps subverted the regimentation of the Fridhemsplan metro station, as well as of an expanding section of the Stockholm metro system, as they eventually moved on. Yet, their disobedience never evolved into a visual uproar. They were removed, erased. Just as graffiti writing often "challenges assumptions about who has access to public literacy, who controls space and who can sanction public images and lettering" (Pennycook 2010, 140), its social existence may just as well confirm rather gloomy expectations about who ultimately controls the semiotics of public spaces. It is rarely writers who determine the long-term durability of an instance of graffiti.

Discussion

The examples presented in this study emphasise that several interconnected forms of mobility are inseparable from dynamic semiotics of place. Accordingly, to simply say that a material instance of semiosis is mobile is not a complete account of all forms of mobility in which it is embedded. Likewise, an account that is limited to one of these forms of mobility will probably be oblivious to other ways of moving. As for the case at hand, the movement of a train through a public transportation system is only a sort of "raw material" (Cresswell 2010, 19) upon which semiotic processes are brought to bear. While this movement undoubtedly partakes in the production of meaning, it cannot in itself be rationalized as the source of meaning, nor as meaning in itself (Cresswell 2006; Adey 2010, 34–39). Acknowledging this relative complexity, it seems more suitable to a mobile imagery, such as a backjump, as a "constellation of mobility" (Cresswell 2010), that is to say, as a linking of "patterns of movement, representations of movement, and ways of practising movement that make sense together" (p. 18). A backjump is clearly mobile *with* several other forms of mobility (cf. Jensen 2010; Thurlow

and Jaworski 2014, 464–465). As stressed by the discussed examples, the production, circulation and eradication of a backjump constitute a prime example of the linking of multiple forms of mobility.

"To speak of the metro first of all is to speak of reading," Augé (2002, 9) writes, hinting at the individual and collective memories that linger in the names of Paris métro stations. Although this suggestive remark resonates with the idea to inquire the sociolinguistic conditions through emplaced semiosis (Shohamy and Gorter 2009, cf. Johnstone 2010), the forms of mobility that ensnare graffiti in the Stockholm metro beget questions about how this reading is done. They ask: what does it mean to look for something that for most of the time remains unseen? How can we make sense of an instance of semiosis that has already been erased? What happens to reading when our objects move about at several interconnected scales? How do our analyses handle the occasions when our objects encounter us, and not vice versa? And, recalling Cresswell (2006), what meanings does this mobility create?

These are questions rather programmatic and can, hence, not be fully answered within the frames of a single study. Nonetheless, they open up new ways of thinking about how mobility engenders the semiotics of place, and about how our modes of observation construct this semiotic object. Since places can be thought of as "continually reproduced through the mobile flows that course through them" (Edensor 2011, 190; cf. Blommaert and Maly 2014, 21), it is relevant to understand how these flows of people, objects and meanings shape places visually and semiotically. For the same reason, it is equally relevant to understand the extent and durability of these flows. In a backjump, semiosis assumes an almost rhythmic structure (cf. Lefebvre 2004), embodying both a temporal and a spatial periodicity. If we think of backjumps as transgressive visual expressions, a sensitization to mobility can help to refine our understanding of what they actually transgress, as well as of how, and when, and why they transgress. This shift of focus directs our attention to the discursive and semiotic techniques and practices that feed into this regimentation, as well as to the moments when these means of control are overturned. An analysis of this interplay between order and disorder, such as those pursued here, is an apt way for thinking about the semiotic work completed by the forms of mobility that coalesce in a backjump (see DeLanda 2006; Anderson and McFarlane 2010; Cresswell and Martin 2012; Stroud 2015). By adjusting our interest to the moments when order appears to break down, as Cresswell and Martin (2012, 526) suggest, we can begin to grasp the ways in which this order is produced and maintained, as well as how it can be reordered.

From this horizon, the transgressiveness of a backjump in the Stockholm metro is evidently dependent upon various forms of mobility. Without a resourceful use of the mobilities of the metro system, there could be no backjumps. Without the intervention of graffiti writing in these controlled forms of movement, there would be no semiotic transformations of places. Without the continuous eradication of graffiti in the Stockholm metro, these semiotic interventions would entail other semiotic effects. This entanglement, in turn, indicates that a backjump's challenge to the moored semiotics of the metro relies on a strategic configuration and resourceful use of other forms of mobility. By unpacking the mobility of backjumps, it is also clear that there exists an intimate relationship between several interconnected forms of mobility and the semiotics of place. This relationship seems to manifest itself in other places and in other types of text and semiotic artefacts (see Sebba 2010; Jaworski 2014; Milani 2014; Stroud and Peck 2015).

An analysis of mobility can, accordingly, serve as a vantage point for further reflections on, as well as insights about, "the when and where of the physical location of language in the world" (Scollon and Scollon 2003, xii). Arguably, this viewpoint, invites a deepened analysis of the practical basis of material semiosis, thus contributing to a spatially interested sociolinguistics at large. Just as this strand of sociolinguistic inquiry has introduced new ways of grasping how material instances of semiosis operate, notably by turning a spatial lens on the semiotic process (Blommaert 2013, 32), a sensitization to various forms of mobility can further refine this understanding. Conceptual

frameworks like linguistic landscapes, semiotic landscapes and geosemiotics have sought to elaborate on the language sciences' longstanding concern with signs in space (see Johnstone 2010; Stroud forth.). Throughout its relatively recent development, this *new* spatial and material turn in sociolinguistics has focused extensively on the emplacement and placedness of semiosis. And while questions about the 'when' and the 'where' of semiosis have been taken up differently across different studies, they often seem to have produced a panoptic view on the relationship between space and semiosis. When this is the case, the 'where' and the 'when' are reduced to the ahistorical 'here' and 'now' of a snapshot representation (Blommaert 2013, 24–27; cf. Massey 2005, 36–38;). In such cases, spatialized semiosis often appears as distinctively fixed. Criticizing this static way of seeing, Cresswell (e.g. 2015, 17–18) has argued that this analytical perspective is contingent upon the "intensely visual idea" (p. 17) of landscape. In his critique, the very notion of landscape relies on a gaze "from a slight distance" and that this aloofness tends to overlook less static aspects of social life, such as practice, interaction and, not least, mobility (Cresswell in Merriman et al. 2008, 194). The accuracy of this view is not uncontested (see Merriman et al. [2008] for an orientation). Indeed, a notion such as landscape, and the place of practice and mobility therein, has been a matter of much debate among human geographers (see, for instance, Cresswell 2003, 2006; Wylie 2007, 2009; Merriman et al. 2008; Rose 2009). It is not unlikely that the same issues will arise in the maturational process of spatially interested sociolinguistics. Reflecting upon such struggles, Massey (2005) offers a balanced comment, noting that "not all views from above are problematical – they are just another way of looking at the world […]. The problem only comes if you fall into thinking that vertical distance lends you truth" (p. 107). This is perchance a timely memento for a sociolinguistics concerned with the similar issues.

That said, however, mobility often precludes a view from above. Instead, it entails a focus on practice, connectivities and relationality (Cresswell 2006, 2010, 2011, 2012; Hannam et al. 2006; Urry 2007; Jensen 2009; Adey 2010). As such, it is a good inroad to the many interconnected 'whens' and 'wheres' of semiotic production, and thus also to a deepened understanding of the semiotics of place. Not only does it provide additional insights about how and why semiosis appears and disappears, but also about how such appearances and disappearances add to the semiotics of place, and not least of all why such processes arise. The co-presence of these forms of mobility can serve to create a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between space and semiosis, and to develop accordingly an account of mobility as a semiotically productive force.

Conclusion

This article has analysed mobility as a productive force in the semiotics of place, which is difficult to tease apart from the spatial existence of semiosis. The cases that were considered emphasizes the fact that mobility exists as several semiotically formative vectors; it is not reducible to the movement and impermanency of certain images, nor to slow visual changes that might unfold across time. The discussion of backjumps brings to the fore the fact that mobility is entangled in semiotically productive practices, that is, in acts of graffiti writing, in the circulation of the graffiti that such writing produces, as well as in the visual transformations and transgressions that these moving instances of writing bring about. Furthermore, mobility is emphatically articulated in acts of erasing graffiti, as well as in the potential afterlife that may extend and reconfigure the dissemination of graffiti across time and space. As an effect, mobility can both reveal and hide central aspects of various semiotic phenomena (cf. Lefebvre 2004, 45), such as matters pertaining to their emergence, tenacity and reordering. Above all, mobility persists as a meaningful, albeit transformable, connectivity between co-productive and even antagonistic phenomena that partake in the semiotization of space and spatialization of semiosis. Thus, a sensitization to mobility can consequently provide an inroad to deepened accounts of the relationship between space, materiality and semiotic practice.

Notes

1. www.stockholm.se/PageFiles/77860/Klotterpolicy.pdf
2. Data extracted from the crime reports database (*Statistik över anmälda brott*) of the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (*Brottsförebyggande rådet,* Brå). Report for Stockholm County (*Stockholms län*) for the post *Klotter i kollektivtrafiken* (Swe. *Illegal graffiti in public transportation*) for the year 2013. Accessible at http://statistik.bra.se/solwebb/action/index , as of November 2014.
3. Interview (2012). *Underground Productions 45*: 58–62. Quote, p. 62.
4. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61LtujqkSLc 3.00-5.44, as of May 2015.
5. In *New York Magazine (1973),* quoted in Cresswell (1992), Castleman (2004) and Milnor (2013), among others.

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